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ABSTRACT

Historically, women have been underrepresented in public school administrative positions, largely due to sex role and occupational stereotyping. This study examines how National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Assessment Centers influenced women's career opportunities, how these women view the process, and what issues face women aspiring to be principals. Presently, 24 NASSP Assessment Centers evaluate administrative aspirants' potential in 12 dimensions: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral and written communication, personal motivation, range of interests, and educational values. The centers also provide data to the candidate and to sponsoring school districts. By late 1983, 624 women had been evaluated at the centers. In this study, survey instruments were sent to the 549 women whose addresses were known; the response rate was 60 percent. Data collected included assessment ratings, promotion history, demographic information, skill improvement efforts, and perceptions about the center proces and equity issues. Of the 332 respondents, 82 have received promotions since their NASSP evaluation. A majority indicated that Assessment Center results were either totally or partially responsible for their promotion, while 22 percent do not perceive assessment as influencing their promotion, and 12 percent do not know the effect of these results. Demographic differences (age, race, and marital status) did not appear to influence promotion decisions. Other results and issues are discussed at length. Included are three references. (MLH)

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THE IMPACT OF PRINCIPALS' ASSESSMENT CENTERS ON CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

This Study Supported by The Graduate School,
Wichita State University,
with the Approval of
The National Association of Secondary School Principals

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September, 1984

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ABSTRACT

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September, 1984

Twenty-four National Association of Secondary School Principals Assessment Centers regularly run sessions in which six intensively trained assessors evaluate the potential of twelve participants (administrative aspirants) on twelve dimensions: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensi-nnnnny, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, personal motivation, range of interests, and educational values. All centers evaluate candidates for elementary, middle, and secondary school principalships on all dimensions and provide data to the candidate and to sponsoring school districts. By the end of 1983, 624 women had participated in NASSP centers.

The purpose of this study has been to examine the impact of NASSP Assessment Centers on career oportunities for women; how those women view the process; and issues facing women who are aspirants for the principalship.

Addresses were not available for some participants, and

survey instruments were sent to 549 of those women. Slightly over 60% responded. Data collected included assessment ratings, promotion history, demographic information, skill improvement efforts, perceptions concerning the center process, and perceptions concerning equity issues. Data were analyzed using Chi Square tests of distributional differences based on Promoted/NonPromoted participants, and based on high/low assessment ratings.

Topics addressed included demographic data and promotion, demographic data and assessment ratings, assessment ratings and promotion, self-ratings and assessment ratings, improvement of skill levels, perceptions concerning the assessment center process, and participants' perceptions of equity issues.

THE IMPACT OF PRINCIPALS' ASSESSMENT CENTERS ON CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

INTRODUCTION.

Historically, women have been under-represented in administrative positions in schools. Studies have reflected that this situation exists due to attitudes prevalent among those persons empowered as school leaders. Women are said to be passive rather than assertive and competitive, conformist and submissive rather than independent and dominant. Additionally, the sex-role stereotype of women describes them as inappropriately emotional and unlearned in behaviors essential to management. Women are not perceived as team leaders, not tough-minded in the face of hard decisions, and are good at detail but incapable of understanding the larger picture.

In terms of occupational typing, women in schools are expected to portray the role of the nurturing teacher while men are perceived to be more skillful in the masculine careers of finance, organization, and mechanics. Sex role socialization has reduced the number of women who aspire to and seek out leadership positions. Throughout the life of a female, socialization continues in both formal and informal settings. Courses, activities, counseling, parents, church and social groups have either consciously or unconsciously

moved to insure that girls will not aspire to unfeminine careers. As a result, many women tend to feel guilty if they so aspire and withdraw from such experiences.

Discrimination is reported to be based on sex role and occupational stereotyping. The literature documents as a prevalent belief the view that communities will not accept women for leadership positions. Subordinates do not want to work for women, nor do colleagues wish to work with them. While the aforementioned attitudes have been identified in the literature, other studies cite surveys that document success of female principals in obtaining community involvement, parent approval of school activities, maintenance of morale, and in demonstrating leadership and supervision. Other studies found that differences in administrative behavior tend to be insignificant or non-existent when factors such as size of school are controlled. A 1980 study (Edison) of women pursuing building leadership pictures a group of women who do not fit the conventional sex role stereotype. These women evidenced realistic ambitions, were assertive, and evidenced a realistic view of administration.

During the next two decades, approximately 50% of the nation's currently employed principals will retire. There has been a rapid increase in the number of women preparing for administrative careers. Selection processes that demonstrate merit, equity, legitimacy, and efficiency need to be identified (Baltzel and Dantler).

A selection alternative identified as promising by

Baltzel and Dantler was the assessment center process. An assessment center is a rigorous, standardaized, highly structered method of evaluating a candidate's performance on behaviorally defined skills. Such skills have been documented as those needed by principals if the educational effectiveness of a school is to be sustained. The National Association of Secondary School Principals' Assessment Centers were cited by the authors as an example of current practice of this exemplary procedure.

Twenty-four NASSP Assessment Centers regularly run sessions in which six intensively trained assessors evaluate the potential of twelve participants (administrative aspirants) on twelve dimensions: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, personal motivation, range of interests, and educational values. All centers evaluate candidates for elementary, middle, and secondary school principalships on all dimensions and provide summary data to the candidate and to participating school districts.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS.

The purpose of this study has been to examine the impact of NASSP Assessment Centers on career oportunities for women; how those women view the process; and issues facing women who are aspirants for the principalship. The questions addressed, with their subsequent findings and conclusions,

are summarized below.

Advancement of Women.

The first purpose of this study was to determine the numbers of women who have received administrative assignments following an assessment center experience, and their perception of the influence of the assessment center experience on that promotion. Survey instruments were mailed to 549 center participants. Of the 332 respondents, 82 have received promotions since their participation in a NASSP Assessment Center. Twelve of that number were promoted between 1976 and 1980, 6 were promoted in 1981, 9 in 1982, 34 in 1983, and 21 in 1984. Sixty-six of the 82 were promoted within the district sponsoring them for assessment.
Of those not promoted, 77 expect to have the opportunity to advance in their present school district; 113 suggest that maybe they will advance.

The perceived influence of the assessment process and successful promotion was raised as a direct question. Eight percent of the respondents indicated that assessment center results were totally responsible for their promotion. Forty-four percent indicated that assessment ratings were partially responsible for their promotion. Twenty-two percent do not perceive assessment as influencing their promotion, while twelve percent do not know the impact of assessment results.

Respondents were asked to identify the number of principal or assistant principal positions open in that

district since their assessment experience, as well as the number of positions filled by women and the racial background of those persons. Recognizing that many would not have the information, it was necessary to check responses individually to identify information that appeared complete and valid. Through that method, data were collected from 40 districts with participants in the NASSP Center program. Of 203 positions available, 84, or 41%, were filled by women. Seventy-seven percent (of 84) were Caucasian, 13% were Black, 9.5% were Hispanic, and .5% were others.

Comments.

1. The progression of the promotion of women between 1976 and 1983 precisely parallels the development and expansion of NASSP Assessment Centers. Opportunities in 1984 were limited because of the time of the study. While it is possible for two major developments to coincide, the expansion of centers, the success of women in those centers, and the corresponding incidence of female promotions strongly suggest that a major result of the assessment center program has been a predominate influence in increasing opportunities for women in school administration.
2. Sixty-six percent of the respondents who have been promoted indicated that center ratings totally or partially influenced their selection. The

inference is that the assessment center movement is a growing influence on the selection of women, and may continue to expand.

3. Forty participating districts have filled 41% of their recent vacancies with women. By any standard the 41% figure represents a significant increase in the placement of women into assistant principalships or principalships. That percentage still cannot represent an equitable distribution of jobs respondents are still facing a male majority in both new appointments (60/40) and in the existing hierarchy.

Demographic Data and Promotion.

The second purpose of the study was to examine demographic profile differences of women who have been promoted and those who have not. Chi square tests of distribution were run across all demographic variables and the variable, Promoted. Twenty-four variables were considered, ranging from size of district, age, race, and marital status to each degree held, grades, and experience.

Comments.

1. Those areas most often identified by respondents as being areas of bias in the selection process are not supported by the data collected. Respondents identified age, marital status, and race as

sources of bias.

2. Degrees Held and Doctoral Degree GPA indicate distribution differences in which those promoted have been those who have obtained advanced degrees and have higher grade point averages in their most recent work.
3. Position (Elementary) and Position (Secondary) show a distribution difference in which those who have been promoted have experienced specialized experience beyond the teaching role. The implication is that administrative aspirants should seek supplementary administrative tasks.
4. Total Years Experience is one of the variables that has influenced promotion. The data favor all categories beyond five years. The statement could be made that there is a minimum of five years of experience required for promotion by the districts represented by these respondents.

Demographic Data and Assessment Ratings.

Ratings as a potential candidate for the principalship were tested against twenty-four demographic variables, using Chi square.

Comments.

1. Master's GPA, Educational Specialist GPA, and Doctoral GPA show significant distributional

differences in overall ratings of candidates. The more degrees held and the higher the GPA, the better participants have fared in the assessment process.

2. While the statistics reflect that the ratings favor the 36-45 year age group, it should be noted that all age groups have a high proportion of people in the very good and outstanding categories.
3. Seventy percent of Caucasian women were identified as being very good or outstanding candidates, while 44.2% of Black women were rated in these two categories. Many educational, social, and ethical questions arise in cosideration of these data. Responses to these issues are beyond the scope of the project.

Assessment Dimensions and Promotion.

The distribution of promoted versus non-promoted participants was studied in terms of ratings on each of the twelve NASSP skill dimensions. Chi square tests were used.

Problem Analysis, Judgment, Organizational Ability, Leadership, and Sensitivity tended to be crucial in promotion. Schmitt's study (1982) indicates that these, plus Oral Communication, have been selected as most critical of the twelve dimensions related to job performance. Veteran practictioners have identified all twelve as variables that

should be addressed in both in-district training programs and administration preparation programs.

Self-Ratings and Assessment Ratings.

A purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between ratings received in an assessment center on each of the twelve NASSP dimensions and the self-perception of those ratings by the participants. Spearman's Rho, a nonparametric correlation procedure, was calculated.

For both promoted and non-promoted respondents, there were significant correlations between assessment ratings and self-ratings. Personal Motivation for those promoted was the single exception. The implication is that self-ratings on the twelve variables can provide a reasonable diagnostic base for the development of training programs.

Perceptions of the Assessment Process.

A major purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of women who have experienced the assessment center process. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the overall ratings of the assessment teams. Candidates who were identified as very good or outstanding tended to agree with the ratings; forty percent of those identified as average candidates agreed with the assessment overall rating. Twenty-four percent of those identified as below average candidates also agreed with the rating.

Approximately one-third of the respondents made comments

about the assessment process. These were categorized into seventeen typical phrases, three positive and fourteen negative. In most cases, negative comments tended to be made by average or below average candidates or by those not promoted, while positive comments tended to be made by stronger or promoted candidates. There were important exceptions. A relatively high number of respondents who were given outstanding ratings felt that the process was biases or subjective. Several strong candidates made note of discrepancies in the center in which they participated. Eleven respondents with above average or outstanding ratings reported that they had received no written evaluation, no recommendations, or unclear recommendations.

Comments.

1. The number of negative comments suggest that both NASSP and individual centers consider the development of additional explanatory materials so that participants will better understand the process.
2. Both NASSP and individual centers should develop feedback instruments to be completed at the end of the two days of activities and after individual interviews.

Improving Skill Levels.

Respondents were asked to identify the extend to which

they have addressed the improvement of skills as a result of the assessment experience. Sixty-six percent reported that they had begun work on skill improvement through university courses (68), special workshops and seminars (103), one-the-job training (79), district training programs (20), or other methods (52).

Assessees were asked "Did your district initiate special developmental experiences on your behalf?" Fifteen percent of the districts represented have made special efforts, primarily in terms of on-the-job training or by providing funds for available workshops and seminars.

Comments.

1. Both self-designed and district-developed efforts have focused on available resources. For the most part, they do not appear to be addressing the specific skill dimensions as they are identified by NASSP. Remedial writing was included in the "Other" category in some personal efforts. Clearly, there is a need for programs to be developed which focus on the twelve assessment dimensions.
2. Only 15% of the participating districts have become engaged in development programs specific to assessment. It will become increasingly necessary for districts to invest energy and resources in upgrading the skills of those women (and men) who have provided diagnostic base-line infor-

mation by their participation in an assessment center.

Participants' Perceptions of Equity Issues.

Respondents were asked to identify by open comments the major issues facing women in administration or by those women in pursuit of administrative positions. Seventeen comments in this area were first tabled in terms of the frequency of occurrence. The seventeen comments were then regrouped in terms of issues related to merit, to fairness/equity, to legitimacy, and to efficiency. It is in those terms that these issues are discussed.

Comments.

1. An issue repeated often by respondents concerned the lack of opportunity to prove competency, the only statement clearly related to merit. Those discussing this issue at length referred both to the lack of experience in the typical woman's credentials which might have provided evidence of competency, and the unwillingness of male administrators to provide even short-term experiences that might serve that purpose. Several of the women who received promotions as a result of the center experience indicated that data provided by the center represented the only evidence of administrative skills in their cre-

dentials. History suggests that both women and minorities often have faced job rejection based on lack of appropriate experience.

Skills sanctioned by assessment center ratings may be the best available opportunity for women to provide proof of skills and for school districts to confirm skills by a method other than an experience requirement.

2. Issues perceived by these respondents often centered on questions of fairness/equity. Six statements represented general or specific problems of fair treatment. The general tone of discussion of these areas ranged from hopelessness on the part of some, to others who predicted slow but certain changes in attitudes that are likely to provide more opportunities in the future.

Other results of this study suggest that there is, indeed, a changing reality in the selection of women as school administrators in many of the participating school districts. That change, however, is not so dramatic that it promises correction of our history of inequity. The perceptions of these women clearly regard continuing unfairness as a reality that will change slowly if at all.

3. Two issues identified by these respondents could be classified under the category of legitimacy--whether

a district conducts clear, open, and well-understood procedures for selection. The items referred to the need for other female support and the reluctance of present administrators to view women in new roles. Whether procedures of selection can correct these concerns or other inequities as perceived by these women is questionable.

In their discussion of the items, there was a notable lack of comment about procedures. More often the focus of attention was on needed changes which would be represented by shifts in attitude and commitment.

4. Five issues were identified within the category of of efficiency--employment practices that focuses on purposes other than those related to the learning outcomes of children. The items identified in this group tended to be reasons provided for not hiring women: women are not good disciplinarians, women cannot devote time because of family commitments, women should be hired on the basis of appearance, women do not have the doctorate. The list could be extended to include all the stereotypes used to classify women as unprepared for administrative roles. In the extended comments, it was clear that the respondents see current conditions as a major deterrent to advancement. They suggest that administrators are attempting to

address the urgent concerns of discipline, finance, the need for more coaches, or similar specific problems, all of which are items that tend to dictate male choices.

While these women see some attitudes changing, they appear to be saying that there will remain a plethora of reasons for not promoting women, all of which are couched in the belief by many that it would be more efficient to hire a man.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

The women who were respondents in this study cannot be considered as a sample of women, of women in administration, or of all women who have applied for school adminisrative positions. The return of 60.7%, however, suggests that they do speak for this population--those who have experienced an NASSP assessment center. Their reactions need to be considered carefully in planning the operation of new centers.

Feedback interviews, especially, should be conducted with great care. These interviews should be conducted with thorough explanations of the candidate's performance, with candor in relation to both weaknesses and strengths, and with full information concerning the use of the data.

Information provided before center participation must be expanded so that no false illusions are created. It seems appropriate to emphasize the value of assessment data

in those cases where experience may be lacking.

Most importantly, both centers and school districts must become engaged in effective developmental efforts. If partipants are willing to provide assessment data, they clearly expect their districts to respond with growth opportunities focused on both strengths and weaknesses.

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